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Chairman:

Mr. KHOUINI

(Tunisia)

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AGENDA ITEM 73: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES
IN THE NEAR EAST

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The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 73: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (A/47/13, 413, 438, 488, 489, 490, 491, 492, 493, 576, 601)

1. Mr. TURKMEN (Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)), introducing his report (A/47/13) covering the period from July 1991 to June 1992 observed that the introductory chapter highlighted the major events which had affected UNRWA and its area of operations in that period, while the rest of the report provided information on its main activities.

2. The fact that peace negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians were still under way a year after they had begun was significant, even though the initial optimism had been tempered by the lack of substantive progress and by the static if not deteriorating economic and social conditions in the occupied territory. An agreement was urgently needed that would remove the cause of the deeply rooted, permanent tension there that inevitably erupted into intermittent violence. The wider geopolitical factors affecting the Middle East gave the entire region a vital stake in the success of the peace process.

3. It should be borne in mind that his report did not cover a new development - the subsequent change of government in Israel - which had created a more positive climate. The new Government's greater willingness to cooperate with UNRWA was an encouraging change of approach. It was obvious to UNRWA, which was involved in the daily life of the Palestinians, that significant steps had to be taken to improve the general atmosphere in the occupied territory if the peace process itself was to be advanced. Several confidence-building measures announced in late August by the new Israeli Government had been welcome, but in order to make a real impact, the Israeli Government should overhaul the legal, military and administrative structures and operational methods of the occupation. Fostering a sound political, economic and social environment in the territory would more effectively allay Israel's legitimate security concerns than would exclusive reliance on military and police measures.

4. The impact of the Gulf War had further depressed a deteriorating economy, because it had caused the return of thousands of formerly well-paid wage earners, who with their extended families had now fallen into poverty; and the loss of external assistance for local Palestinian welfare bodies. The deepening economic crisis, complicated by the most severe winter in living memory and combined with high population growth, was further straining the social fabric of Palestinian society, already beset by poor housing and sanitation. The socio-economic conditions were worst in the Gaza Strip, which had a long-term problem of survival also because of environmental problems of great magnitude caused by water shortage, pollution and lack of adequate sewage disposal.

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(Mr. Türkmen)

5. In Lebanon, the misery he had recently seen among the displaced Palestinians was also extremely worrying. The schooling and medical care they received through UNRWA was virtually the only glimmer of hope on their horizon.

6. UNRWA was currently providing educational, health and social services to about 2.7 million Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and the occupied territory, and the magnitude and scope of its activities over the past 43 years was often not realized. The Agency's education programme took the lion's share of the General Fund expenditure, almost 50 per cent, followed by health at 17 per cent, and relief and social services at 11 per cent. In the field of education, the Agency's successful teacher training and vocational training programmes were being revamped to reflect the post-Gulf War situation.

7. A number of new strategies and subprogrammes had also been introduced in its health programme, where funding for hospital care as well as primary health care was a major problem. He was pleased to report that UNRWA had signed an agreement with the European Community for the construction of a general hospital in the Gaza Strip that would not only alleviate a desperate need but create jobs, and provide a foundation for the future health infrastructure. Attention was being focused on environmental health in refugee camps that had been set up 44 years earlier on a temporary basis. Untreated sewage posed a grave health hazard in all camps. In Lebanon, the Agency was seeking donors to finance a sewage plant; in the West Bank, thanks largely to two donors, technical design work was well advanced; and in the Gaza Strip, where the situation was the most serious, UNRWA was in the process of setting up an environmental health planning and development unit.

8. As to its social services, UNRWA had established a two-pronged approach to the alleviation of poverty in the occupied territory: immediate direct relief and longer-term projects dealing with socio-economic advancement, especially of women and other vulnerable groups. The Agency's income-generation programme had been expanded in 1991 to help develop small businesses.

9. With respect to the Agency's financial situation, there had been no substantial decrease in contributions to the General Fund, but the extraordinary measures programme for Lebanon and the occupied territory was about \$4 million short, probably because of competing demands from other parts of the world and the unjustified view that the peace process obviated the need for emergency interventions. In the Gaza Strip, for example, whenever there was a strictly imposed curfew, a special food distribution by the Agency was required. In Lebanon, the emergency needs were the result of a long civil war and in their deeply rooted misery the Palestine refugees needed continuing urgent assistance to enable them to surmount the degrading conditions of their lives. UNRWA still required funds for environmental health projects in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon, for housing in the occupied territory and in Lebanon,

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(Mr. Türkmen)

and for income generation in the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon and eventually the Syrian Arab Republic. Despite 1991 and 1992 appeals, the majority of those needs were unfunded and hence unimplemented. He sincerely hoped that UNRWA's appeal for emergency assistance would be met with greater generosity. For 1993, the financial picture appeared gloomier: the second year of the Agency's biennial budget and perhaps also the extraordinary measures programme might not be fully funded. Despite its best efforts, the Agency continued to have a narrow donor base, with 95 per cent of its General Fund constituted by 20 major donors, including the European Community.

10. He wished to inform the Committee about the Agency's efforts on behalf of the Palestinians in Kuwait, in particular those with Egyptian travel documents. With the full cooperation and financial assistance of the Government of Kuwait, a team had been sent to Kuwait to survey the situation, and concerned Governments were being approached to find appropriate solutions.

11. Since its operations could not remain aloof from the developments affecting the region, the Agency was giving thought to what its role would be if there was an agreed interim period of self-government in the context of the peace process. There had been informal exchanges of views with the Palestinians in the technical areas in which UNRWA was active, and basically it would do what the self-governing bodies asked it to do and what the donors were willing to fund. In anticipation of successful negotiations, there had already been a greater flow of donor funds into the occupied territory. UNRWA hoped that there would similarly be greater involvement of the United Nations system in an interim period of self-government, with its assistance coordinated to achieve optimal and coherent results.

12. Tribute must be paid to the host Governments in the region, without whose unstinting support the Agency's work would have been impossible and the situation of the refugees untenable. Jordan in particular had had to cope with over 350,000 Palestinians who had arrived from the Gulf in the past two years alone. The host Governments had indeed taken on a disproportionate share of the burden.

13. Since the mandate of UNRWA would expire in June 1993, the current session of the General Assembly would be taking a decision on the matter.

14. Mr. SEIM (Norway), speaking as Rapporteur of the Working Group on the Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, introduced the report of the Working Group (A/47/576), reviewing in particular the assessment, in part IV of the report, of the Agency's current financial situation and its needs for 1993, which had been based on a briefing by the UNRWA Controller, and the Working Group's recommendations found in paragraphs 18 and 19.

15. Mr. ABU ODEH (Jordan) said that Jordan's concern with the question of the Palestine refugees stemmed from the fact that Jordan hosted the greatest number of Palestine refugees and had been the country most strongly affected by the tragedy of the Palestinian people, politically, economically and socially, since 1948. There had been an uninterrupted influx into the country of individuals and families from the occupied Palestinian territory since 1967 owing to various pressures exerted by the occupation authorities and in recent months, in the wake of the Gulf crisis, Jordan had taken in more than 300,000 persons, mostly Palestine refugees. UNRWA had thus found itself faced with increasing responsibilities in meeting the needs of the refugees in Jordan. The fact that the Agency's services had always been inadequate, owing to financial constraints, placed additional burdens on Jordan's infrastructure and finances. Thus, from both the political and humanitarian standpoints, Jordan was in a special position with regard to the question of the Palestine refugees and had a particular interest in UNRWA.

16. The question of the Palestine refugees was basically a political issue that had given rise to a human tragedy, the two aspects, political and humanitarian, being inseparable. UNRWA must therefore continue its work wherever there were Palestine refugees until the achievement of a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the Middle East conflict, of which the Palestinian question was the core.

17. The level of services, which UNRWA did everything within its means to provide, was adversely affected by a sorely inadequate budget. The failure of the international community to provide sufficient funds, moreover, jeopardized the peace negotiations, for the worsening conditions of the Palestine refugees led to increased despair and extremism. In addition, tyrannical measures taken by the Israeli authorities in the refugee camps in the occupied territory often involved interference with the the Agency's performance of the duties entrusted to it internationally.

18. His delegation, therefore, while thanking UNRWA for its enormous efforts, felt that it was incumbent on the international community to provide greater material and moral support to the Agency, especially in the current difficult period following the Gulf War. It was essential to ensure the safety of the Palestine refugees, safeguard their legal and humanitarian rights and strive to obtain the release of all those unjustly detained; pressure Israel to facilitate the return, as an inalienable right, of all emigrants to their former place of residence in the territories occupied by Israel since 1967; and quickly remedy the deteriorating living conditions in the camps, especially in the West Bank and Gaza, where income-generating projects were needed to stem growing unemployment. A list of required projects should be prepared for proposal to donor States. It was essential also to ensure the speedy return of UNRWA to its headquarters in the region so as to facilitate programme execution and to strengthen the conviction that the mandate of UNRWA would continue until the problem of the Palestine refugees was solved within the framework of a just, peaceful settlement of the Palestinian question based on international legitimacy.

19. Mr. MANSOUR (Observer for Palestine) said that the uprooting, forcible displacement and dispossession of his people by Zionist settler colonialism was one of the greatest tragedies of contemporary history. As a result of both State and individual Israeli terrorism, the number of Palestinian refugees in the occupied territory, the neighbouring Arab States and other countries had reached 2.65 million.

20. As the intifadah of the Palestinian people, which was determined to end Israeli occupation, approached its fifth year, the report of the Commissioner-General (A/47/13) and other reports of international organizations described the brutality of Israel against the Palestinian people in the occupied territory. According to the Commissioner-General's report, the total number of Palestinian casualties since the beginning of the intifadah had reached 1,111 killed and 75,500 injured, including a significant proportion of children and women. Approximately 12,700 residents of the occupied territories were in detention, about 8,500 of them held in a prison or detention centre situated outside the occupied territory, in violation of the fourth Geneva Convention. The actual figures were much higher because the Agency relied solely on information from hospitals and UNRWA clinics. UNRWA had protested those crimes and other illegal Israeli measures such as curfews, punitive demolition and sealing of houses and shelters, expropriation of land and uprooting of thousands of trees, as violations of international humanitarian law.

21. He cited references in the report to the Israeli use of undercover units, high taxation rates and increasingly aggressive behaviour of Israeli settlers towards the Palestinian population and sometimes towards UNRWA staff and premises. That hostility posed a threat to the safety of the Agency's staff, who were also frequently harassed by Israeli security forces.

22. Further problems had arisen from the loss of remittances from Palestinians previously working in the Gulf States and the arrival in Jordan of more than 300,000 Palestinians from Kuwait.

23. The situation in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip remained critical, since no significant relaxation of the traditional pattern of Israeli occupation policies had occurred. Contrary to expectation, the situation in the occupied territory during the initial months of the new Israel Government was even worse, as evidenced by the intensification of the settlement policy in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem and the increase in Israeli brutality during the hunger strike of the Palestinian prisoners in September 1992.

24. As early as 1948, in its resolution 194 (III), the United Nations had called for refugees wishing to return home to be allowed to do so as early as possible. Israel had consistently refused to implement that and other relevant United Nations resolutions. That Israeli intransigence had forced the General Assembly to establish UNRWA in 1949 and subsequently to renew its mandate. Furthermore, Israel had sought the destruction of refugee camps and the forced integration of the refugees into Arab countries. The demolition of

(Mr. Mansour, Observer, Palestine)

refugee shelters in occupied Palestine and Lebanon was testimony to that Israeli policy. Again, massive Jewish immigration from the former Soviet Union and elsewhere had increased Israeli desire to expel the Palestinian people from their own country. Israel was attempting to negate the existence of the Palestinian people and their inalienable national rights, including the right of refugees and displaced persons to return to their homes and property; the right to exercise self-determination; and the right to independence and statehood under the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

25. In the hope that a better world based on justice and fairness could be emerging, the PLO had welcomed the convening of the peace conference in Madrid and had authorized Palestinian participation in it. The question of Palestine refugees was a key component of a just solution to the Palestine question. The international community was not divided as to how that question should be resolved, as witness the annual introduction of resolution A in the Special Political Committee by the United States and the fact that not one State, including Israel, voted against it.

26. With negotiations under way, there was no excuse for not implementing the United Nations resolutions. The international community was obliged to uphold international legality and to implement its collective achievements. A double standard in implementing United Nations resolutions should not be allowed. The international community had not been wrong to adopt them. Israel had been wrong all along, and it was high time that Israel corrected itself and joined the peace process. Israel, however, had boycotted the multilateral seminar on refugees held in Ottawa, Canada, in May 1992. Another round of that seminar was due to be convened in Ottawa; he wondered whether Israel would attend. Any efforts the seminar could make to resolve the question of Palestine refugees and displaced persons would be welcomed by the Palestinian people and their leadership, but the appropriate place to address that issue was in bilateral negotiations between the PLO and the Israelis.

27. The United Nations had been involved in the Palestine question ever since its creation: Palestine supported the Secretary-General's insistence on full United Nations participation in the current peace process and looked forward to greater involvement of the United Nations and particularly UNRWA. His organization fully supported UNRWA and would continue to cooperate with it until a just political solution was found to the Palestinian refugee problem. In that connection, the PLO strongly supported the extension of the Agency's mandate for three more years.

28. Mr. CLIFF (United Kingdom), speaking on behalf of the European Community and its member States, said that their delegations would support the renewal of the mandate of UNRWA for a further three years.

29. From the moment of its creation in 1949, UNRWA had had to adapt to changing political and economic circumstances. Despite everything, it had

(Mr. Cliff, United Kingdom)

continued to provide shelter, food, education and medical care for Palestine refugees. Through the Agency, the United Nations had played a vital role in the region, bringing a minimum of stability to the shaken lives and communities of the Palestinians.

30. However, aid was no substitute for a political solution. The Community was firmly committed to a constructive role in the current peace process and hoped it would lead to a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement so that the work of UNRWA would no longer be needed. For the moment, it welcomed the more positive approach to the peace process taken by the present Israeli Government and the involvement of the United Nations as a full participant in the multilateral negotiations, and looked forward to UNRWA playing its part.

31. Despite some encouraging political progress, the economic and humanitarian situation in the Agency's field of operations remained of serious concern. The Community deplored the use of violence by all parties in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem. The Israeli authorities, who, under the fourth Geneva Convention, were responsible for the situation in the occupied territories, had continued to apply repressive measures, often out of proportion to the Palestinian demonstrations and attacks. Many Palestinian victims had required emergency treatment in UNRWA clinics and its own staff had also been affected: since 1987, nine staff members had been killed and many injured. The disregard of the Israeli authorities for UNRWA privileges and immunities was a matter of grave concern. He urged Israel to abide by its obligations under the fourth Geneva Convention and appealed to all parties to respect the rights and duties of UNRWA staff, which derived from the Charter.

32. Although all universities in the occupied territories had reopened, educational programmes had continued to be disrupted by curfews, strikes and Israeli restrictions. The Community was concerned about the detrimental effect the situation was having on students' performance, and called upon Israel to ensure that all educational establishments would remain open throughout the academic year.

33. The European Community's contribution to UNRWA in 1992 had been approximately 45 million European Currency Units (ECU) or \$55 million for educational, health and food programmes. Member States' individual contributions had been about \$48 million. The Community and its member States had also made substantial contributions to emergency appeals, and the Community had pledged ECU 12 million, or about \$17 million, at the 1992 pledging conference towards a planned UNRWA hospital in Gaza. The Community and its member States were the largest donor to the Agency's regular budget and a substantial donor to emergency and other programmes. They remained concerned about the continued inadequacy of financial resources for all UNRWA activities, and commended the Commissioner-General's efforts to raise funds. Countries that had made generous contributions in the past should continue to do so, and countries that had contributed little or nothing, particularly the wealthier States in the region, should give generously.

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34. Mr. AKŞIN (Turkey) said that his delegation considered the Peace Conference on the Middle East to be a historic opportunity to reach a just and lasting solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict and a courageous step in the right direction. Unfortunately, the optimism and hope generated by the peace process had not brought any improvement in the daily lives of Palestinians in the occupied territories. The Israeli authorities had continued their policies of repression, including collective punishment and punitive demolition and sealing of homes and shelters. Israeli practices in violation of the 1949 Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War continued. His delegation fully supported UNRWA appeals to the Israeli Government for confidence-building measures to help ease tensions in the occupied territories.

35. UNRWA had an impressive record in providing education, relief and medical care to 2.5 million displaced Palestinians despite very difficult circumstances. His delegation was concerned with the loss of income and remittances after the return of thousands of migrant workers following the Gulf crisis, which had seriously affected the economic conditions of the Palestinian people and created new challenges for UNRWA. In that context, the Agency's expanded programme of assistance launched in 1988 to improve living conditions in refugee camps was especially important. The revolving fund set up in 1991 to compensate for Palestinians' loss of income deserved the full support of the international community.

36. His delegation was disturbed to learn of the difficulties faced by UNRWA staff in the occupied territories. The Israeli authorities' disregard of the privileges and immunities of UNRWA and its assertion of control over Agency operations were unacceptable.

37. The help provided by UNRWA to Palestinians could not be an alternative to a just political solution of the Palestine question. Although enormous difficulties lay in the way of a peace settlement, his delegation hoped that negotiations would lead, as a first stage, to an interim self-government in the West Bank and Gaza. UNRWA might provide valuable services at that stage, and could in any case make a valuable contribution to the work of the Working Group on Refugees to be held in Ottawa from 11 to 12 November 1992.

38. Although pleased to note that UNRWA had received sufficient funding for its core programme in 1991 and expected to do so again in 1992, his delegation shared the Commissioner-General's view that the Agency's regular budget needed to be increased by 5 per cent to meet the growing needs of 2.7 million people. Governments that had not yet contributed to UNRWA should make an effort to do so and contributing Governments should strive to increase their share. His own Government, in recognition of the valuable services rendered by UNRWA, had increased its contribution from \$40,000 to \$100,000.

39. Ms. RAVN (Norway), speaking on behalf of the five Nordic countries, thanked the Commissioner-General for his comprehensive and illuminating report. Nowhere in the world were there such high numbers of long-term refugees as in the Middle East. As a result of the Gulf conflict, the demands on UNRWA had increased even more, primarily because of the influx of Palestinians from the Gulf area, and the socio-economic deterioration in the occupied territories and Jordan had been aggravated by the loss of remittances from Palestinians in the Gulf area. Although the Agency had continued to cope impressively with those challenges, it was necessary to emphasize that the appalling social and economic conditions in the Gaza Strip gave rise to particular concern.

40. Only a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Arab conflict and the Palestinian question could fundamentally improve the situation of the refugees. Over the past year, the unprecedented opportunities offered by the peace process in the Middle East had been given renewed impetus by the positive signals from the new Israeli Government. The Nordic countries appealed to all parties to show flexibility and far-sightedness and to refrain from any act that might constitute an obstacle to the peace process.

41. One of the problems that must be addressed by the peace negotiations was the plight of refugees caused by the Israeli-Arab conflict. The Multilateral Working Group on Refugees had thus been established as part of the ongoing peace process. As the multilateral and bilateral talks were mutually reinforcing, the former might contribute to creating an atmosphere conducive to a settlement of the longstanding bilateral issues between Israel and the Palestinians. The Working Group on Refugees had held its first meeting in May 1992, and a new meeting was scheduled in November. Norway had expressed its readiness to host a meeting of the Working Group in Oslo in 1993. It welcomed the fact that the United Nations was now a full extraregional participant in the multilateral negotiations and foresaw an important role for UNRWA in the Working Group.

42. As was pointed out in the Commissioner-General's report, the situation in the occupied territories stood in sharp contrast to the optimism created by the opening of the peace talks. Although the number of people killed and injured in the intifadah-related incidents had again decreased, it remained high, as did the number of Palestinians killed in intra-Palestinian confrontations. Those figures were distressing reminders of the deep roots of the Palestinian question.

43. The Nordic countries continued to be preoccupied by Israeli measures such as administrative detention and the sealing and demolition of houses in the West Bank and Gaza. They urged Israel to comply fully with the provisions of the fourth Geneva Convention and to cease its settlement policies in the occupied territories and welcomed the measures taken so far in the latter connection by the Israeli Government. They were also deeply concerned for the safety of UNRWA staff and the integrity of its premises. Although glad that

(Ms. Ravn, Norway)

no deportations had been carried out in the period covered by the report, they continued to be opposed to the policy of deportations.

44. Throughout the period, UNRWA had continued its activity in the three key areas of education, health and relief and social services. The Nordic countries were encouraged by the cost-effective way in which education was carried out in UNRWA schools in spite of difficult circumstances but shared the concern expressed in the report at the continued closures of schools in the occupied territories. They were, on the other hand, happy to note that the universities were now open and trusted that they would remain so.

45. UNRWA was to be commended for its efforts to upgrade emergency medical care in the West Bank and Gaza and to improve the very low standards of water supply, waste disposal and general sanitation in the camps. Low hospital and health centre capacity, particularly within the area of primary care, remained, however, a matter of concern.

46. UNRWA's efforts to assist the most needy families by assuring basic standards of nutrition, shelter and clothing were of fundamental importance. It must not be forgotten that it was essential to raise the socio-economic level of the refugee population as a whole. The Nordic Governments therefore welcomed the Agency's increasing engagement in income-generating programmes. They also welcomed the involvement of other United Nations agencies, which constituted a valuable complement to the work of UNRWA. Continued and expanded inter-agency cooperation and coordination were needed to ensure optimal use of resources.

47. If the present level of services was to be maintained, an adequate resource base for the Agency must be ensured. The Nordic Governments had noted in particular the concern expressed by the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA regarding the difficulties experienced in maintaining the emergency-related programmes. They supported the view that a broadening of the Agency's donor base should continue to constitute a major priority. Particular efforts should continue to be directed towards the wealthier countries of the region in order to increase the level of their contributions.

48. The Nordic countries continued their firm support of the Agency's important activities. In 1992, their contributions had amounted to almost one fourth of the total from individual countries to its General Fund and ongoing activities; they had also supported its emergency and special operations.

49. Experience had demonstrated the importance of the Agency's activities and the international community must not fail to provide it with the necessary support at the present encouraging juncture in the history of the Middle East.

50. Mr. THAN TAI HING (Malaysia) said that the report of the Commissioner-General again reflected the deplorable conditions the Palestine refugees had to endure and UNRWA's steadfast efforts to alleviate their sufferings. His delegation appreciated the dedication and skill of the Agency's international staff and fully supported the Secretary-General's pledge to "continue to do his utmost to ensure the safety of all the United Nations staff". It was, indeed, the collective responsibility of the United Nations to ensure the security of UNRWA staff. His delegation again called on Israel to desist from acts of aggression against the Palestinian people and to release all arbitrarily detained Palestine refugees as well as the employees of UNRWA who were attempting to carry out the mandate of the United Nations. It shared the Commissioner-General's concern with regard to the Agency's funding prospects. His country would maintain its modest but regular contribution to UNRWA and again supported the recommendations of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA urging Member States that had not contributed to UNRWA to do so and those Member States which could do so to increase their contributions. It also welcomed the change made in the Agency's biennial budgetary cycle for 1992-1993, which had improved the efficiency of the use of its resources, as well as the involvement, for the first time, of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions in the Agency's budgetary process.

51. Malaysia commended the excellent work of the Agency in the field of relief and direct social service and in promoting self-reliance through developmental programmes. The development programmes for refugees with special needs, particularly women and disabled persons, were of particular interest. In that regard, the Agency was to be congratulated for the launching of a Palestinian Women's Initiative Fund. The increase in drug abuses among the youth in the occupied territories was, however, a cause for concern. His delegation called on the youth of the Palestinian people to fight the drug menace and urged the staff of UNRWA and other social workers to develop remedial measures to address the problem on an urgent basis.

52. Malaysia condemned the continued Israeli interference with the Agency's operations and noted with concern that there had been no progress on the claim by UNRWA against the Government of Israel regarding damage to its property and facilities resulting from Israeli military actions. The occupying Power must be reminded that it was directly responsible and liable under international law for the damages and losses incurred by the Agency and urged to pay the outstanding arrears it owed to the Agency.

53. His delegation deplored the policy and practices of Israel which had prolonged the closure of educational and vocational institutions which were largely operated by the Agency. Illegal military closures of schools in the occupied territories were on the rise and the number of injuries, fatalities and detentions among young students and trainees at the Agency's educational institutions had reached an alarming state. Those inhumane actions deserved the strongest condemnation by the international community. Malaysia once again called upon Israel to fulfil its obligations in accordance with the

(Mr. Than Tai Hing, Malaysia)

provisions of the fourth Geneva Convention (1949), to reopen all educational and vocational institutions and to release unconditionally all students currently under detention.

54. It was a matter of serious concern to his delegation that the repatriation or compensation of the refugees had not been accomplished and that no substantial progress had been made in the programme for the reintegration of refugees either by repatriation or resettlement. It condemned the continuing Israeli policy of denying the right of return of all refugees and reaffirmed its support of the inalienable right of all displaced Palestinian inhabitants to return to their homes or former places of residence in the territories occupied by Israel since 1967. Despite the repeated calls by the international community for Israel to desist from its practices, it continued and had indeed increased its policies and practices of repression, dispossession, detention and killings.

55. Since the beginning of the intifadah more than 1,000 Palestinians had been killed by the Israeli security forces and many more young people were languishing in detention camps and prisons. His delegation sympathized with the Palestinian inmates who had recently launched a hunger strike in protest against the deplorable conditions in the prisons and was concerned that the situation in the occupied territories had recently deteriorated. It urged the General Assembly and the Security Council to give immediate consideration to sending observer missions to the occupied territories affected in order to prevent Israeli brutality against the innocent Palestinian people. Given the deep sense of vulnerability of the Palestinians in the occupied territories, Malaysia urged the Security Council to implement resolution 681 (1990) in earnest in order to ensure the safety and protection of Palestinian rights in the occupied territories. In that connection, it looked forward to the report of the Secretary-General requested under that resolution.

56. Mr. SINHASANI (Thailand) expressed his delegation's appreciation of the Commissioner-General's comprehensive report on the work of UNRWA, which had functioned effectively since its inception in spite of the Agency's serious financial constraints and the constant danger in which its staff lived. Education continued to be one of the most important services the Agency provided and it should be allowed to continue to do so without interruption. Its record in the area of health care was also commendable, particularly in view of the fact that the demand on its medical services continued to increase at a rate greater than the resources allotted to the programme. His delegation also noted with satisfaction the Agency's close cooperation with other agencies of the United Nations system, in particular, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund. Although it was encouraging to note that the Agency's financial condition for 1991 had been relatively healthy, strenuous efforts should be made to raise additional funds to enable it to cope with the increased demand and to improve its flexibility in responding to emergency situations. Thailand had made regular contributions to UNRWA and would maintain its level of support for the Agency.

(Mr. Sinhaseni, Thailand)

57. The historic meeting in Madrid in October 1991 and the ongoing discussions in Washington had given cause for optimism that a settlement of the Palestine question as well as the broader Middle East conflict was finally within reach. Until a just and comprehensive peace in that region was found, however, the services provided by UNRWA remained indispensable to the livelihood and well-being of the Palestine refugees.

58. Mr. ANSAY (Organization of the Islamic Conference) said that the continued existence of UNRWA, 42 years after its inception, was indicative of the failure of the international community to bring about a just and lasting solution to the Palestine question. Since that question and the problem of Jerusalem were its raison d'être, the Organization of the Islamic Conference held that a lasting and equitable solution should involve the withdrawal of Israel from all Arab territories it had occupied since 1967, including Holy Jerusalem, the recognition of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their rights to return to their homeland, to self-determination and to establish their independent State with Jerusalem as its capital, and the recognition of the right of all States in the region to live within secure and internationally recognized boundaries. In that context, it welcomed the holding of an international peace conference in Madrid and fully supported the ongoing peace talks in Washington.

59. The well-established UNRWA educational, health and social welfare programmes were such as were normally provided by Governments. UNRWA had been created solely for Palestine refugees because of the historical context of the Palestine problem. UNRWA was therefore a symbol of the international commitment to the Palestinian people and the belief that they should benefit from the international community's assistance until the problem was resolved. The Agency had shared in the convulsions of the region in which it operated, from the war of 1948 to the Gulf crisis; continual increases in its operations had been required with correspondingly greater demands on its limited resources. Until the day arrived when its services were no longer required, the international community should see to it that the Agency was supplied with the resources and moral support it must have if it was to carry out the will of the General Assembly. Its vital humanitarian assistance must continue whatever the outcome of the current peace negotiations, and it would continue to need assistance and support from Member States, in particular from current and prospective donor countries.

60. The Organization of the Islamic Conference still considered UNRWA the most fitting humanitarian body to assist the Palestinian people during the current period of transition and supported the renewal of its mandate for a further three years.

The meeting rose at 5.30 p.m.